

MODERN EDUCATION AND THE RISE OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN KASHMIR (1846-1931)

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We had come to know England through her glorious literature, which had brought new inspiration into our young lives. The English authors whose books and poems we studied were full of love for humanity, justice and freedom. This great literary tradition had come down to us from the revolutionary period. All this fired our youthful imaginations...

Rabindranath Tagore

The variegated pattern of the British conquest of India, and the different strategies through which various parts of the country were brought under colonial rule, had resulted in two-fifths of the sub-continent being ruled by the Indian Princes. The total number of the Princely States was 562. The areas ruled by the Princes included Indian States like Hyderabad, Mysore and Kashmir, that were equal in size to many European countries, and numerous small states, as small as a village, who counted their population in thousands. The common feature was that all of them, big and small recognized the paramountcy of the British Government.

In return the British guaranteed the Princes against any threat to their autocratic power, internal or external. Most of the Princely States were run as unmitigated autocracies, with absolute power concentrated in the hands of the ruler, or his favourites. The burden of taxes was usually heavier than in British India, and there was usually much less of the rule of law and civil liberties. The rulers had unrestrained power over the states revenues for personal use, and this often led to ostentatious living and feudalistic pattern of expenditure. No doubt some enlightened rulers and their ministers did make attempts, from time to time, to introduce reforms in the administration. But, the vast majority of the states were bastions of economic, social, political and educational backwardness, for reasons not totally of their own making.¹

Someone who is not aware of the history of modern education in Kashmir, especially its disproportionate growth between the two main communities viz. Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims, may wonder to notice the belated emergence of political consciousness in Kashmir; very late in comparison to British India. However, once it is learnt that the Muslims – the majority community of the State – started modern

education very late,² one can comprehend the situation with greater ease. Unlike the Pandits who besides having a strong pedigree of being a literate community³ and being the most favoured subjects of the Dogra regime, which encouraged and enabled them to benefit themselves from the new opportunities provided by modernization, the Muslims except a handful of the religious class had neither literary or an official pedigree nor did they enjoy any State patronage. Instead they were an oppressed mass. Education to them was a distant luxury.⁴ The religious class, the only Muslim group with any educational background, had access to vast economic resources so that for a long time it did not feel the pressure of modernisation⁵ which had prompted the Pandit official class to favourably respond to it.⁶ The Muslim religious class, on the other hand, discouraged the community from receiving modern education.⁷ In this they had an obvious vested interest.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century one does not find even a single Muslim boy in the Christian missionary schools.⁸ For political reasons, the Government also for a long time did not show any interest in disseminating modern education among the Muslims. To quote Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz:⁹

The awareness that they (rulers) were Hindus and the over-whelming majority of the Kashmiris professed Islam, constantly made them apprehensive. They disliked the idea of making their subjects politically conscious and thought that imparting of education was only an effective way of awakening the people to their political and human rights.

Funding a few *madrassas* and *maktabs* was the only interest shown by the rulers till the late seventies of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ The establishment of British Residency in Kashmir in 1885 actually some relief for Kashmiris, in general, and the Muslims, in particular. It is after 1885 that the Government showed some interest in providing education for the masses when some Primary and Middle schools were opened in different parts of the Valley. However, even in 1891 there were only 18 schools in Kashmir out of which 17 primary schools and one was a middle school. Of the 18 schools, 10 were situated in Srinagar and the rest in other towns of the Valley.¹¹ Realising the baneful impact of the educational backwardness of the Kashmiri Muslims, their sympathisers in India persuaded the Maharajas to pay attention towards the educational aspirations of the Muslim community of Kashmir.¹² As a result the Government opened some more schools and offered some financial assistance in the form of scholarships for attracting the Muslims towards modern education.¹³ On account of opening up of schools in different parts of the Valley and providing

them some financial help, there was some response from the Muslims towards modern education.

If not immediately but definitely from the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kashmiri Muslims started realising the background and consequences of the apathy of their rulers towards educating the Muslim masses. It was fully realised that the Government was shirking its responsibility simply because of political considerations, apprehending that education would make the people conscious against their exploiters.¹⁴ Besides, it was owing to its feudalistic character that the State had such an attitude towards the education of its subjects.

Prominent Kashmiri Muslims pleaded for providing educational facilities to the Muslims and devising ways and means for encouraging their education. However, when all the pleas and petitions of Muslims went unheeded, they sought the support of their co-religionist sympathisers of British India especially those of Punjab to exercise their influence for persuading the Maharaja to accede to this genuine demand of Kashmiri Muslims. As a result the All-India Muslim Educational Conference sent a deputation headed by Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan to Kashmir in 1913. The deputation presented a memorandum to the Maharaja requesting him to take care of the educational aspirations of the Muslim community.¹⁵ It was in response to the persuasion by the Indian Muslims that the Government appointed an official known as Special Inspector for Muhamadan education,¹⁶ and appointed an Education Commission in May 1916, under the chairmanship of Mr. Sharp.¹⁷

However, most of the recommendations of the Sharp Commission were not implemented at all. For example, it had recommended that the villages with a population of 500 should be provided with a primary school,¹⁸ but the Government turned a deaf ear to it, though this recommendation was upheld by other commissions appointed by the Government from time to time to recommend ways and means to improve the lot of the people, particularly that of the Muslim community.¹⁹ The malafide intentions of the Government can be inferred from the fact that it kept the recommendations of the Sharp Commission as top secret so that the Muslims did not get know of it.²⁰ After a gap of 15 years the Glancy Commission remarked:²¹

About some 16 years ago the Education Commissioner of the Government of India visited Jammu and Kashmir State in response to the request made by the Kashmir Darbar so that he would make necessary recommendations for reforming educational system. It is

a common complaint that the recommendations of Mr. Sharp were not properly published and were to a large extent forgotten.

In fact, the Muslims were not at all happy with the response of the Government to the Sharp Commission Report. They expressed their dissatisfaction time and again. In the draft of demands presented by the Kashmiri Muslims to Maharaja Hari Singh on 19 October 1931, the Muslim leadership complained:²²

The Muslims of Kashmir are deplorably backward in education. Unfortunately, Mr. Sharp's report, which would have benefited us, is not acted upon.

It may be noted that the predominant population of the Muslim community lived in villages and the predominant population of the pandit community were urban dwellers.²³ Therefore, the negligence of the Government with regard to the establishment of even primary schools in about 80 per cent of the total villages of Kashmir was more disadvantageous to the Muslim community. It may be noted that out of 3,579 villages of Kashmir, only 618 villages had elementary educational facilities.²⁴ Not satisfied with the Government's attitude, the Muslims of Kashmir pleaded for taking some necessary steps to disseminate education among the Muslims. In their memorandum, submitted by the prominent Kashmiri Muslims to Lord Reading, they requested:²⁵

A Muslim or an European expert on education be appointed to look after Muslim education. Compulsory free primary education be introduced and the same be initiated from Srinagar city. Muslims be recruited both as teachers and inspectors in greater number and sufficient number of scholarships be made available to them for higher education in India and abroad.

The growing consciousness among the Muslims that the State had been adopting a nonchalant towards promoting education among them is evident from the fact that educational grievances formed the main complaint of the Kashmiri Muslims as submitted to the Glancy Commission:²⁶

Of the complaints submitted to the Commission, the most common and severe complaint is that some communities and especially the Muslims are not provided with adequate educational facilities.

It may not be beside the point to mention here that though the Kashmir Valley contributed a major share to the revenues of the Jammu and Kashmir State,²⁷ a discriminatory policy was adopted towards its development. While it was true with regard to all developmental works, it was truer in the case of education. For example, even in 1932, when after a great pressure the State had modified its discriminatory attitude,

there were 32 middle schools in Jammu whereas their number in the Kashmir Valley was only 27.²⁸ The Muslims were not only suffering for want of adequate number of educational institutions even for elementary instruction but the Pandits, who like other branches of the administration had also monopolized the department of education, also discouraged the Muslim students.²⁹ This is why Muslim leadership time and again asked for the appointment of Muslim teachers as an effective means to attract the Muslims towards education.³⁰ And this is also the reason why both the Sharp Commission as well as the Glancy Commission upheld this demand of the Muslim community.³¹ The Glancy Commission, while inquiring about the poor representation of Muslims in S.P. College of Srinagar, was told: "The Pandit teachers discourage the Muslims from taking science subjects."³²

Though on paper the Government had earmarked some amount of money for the grant of scholarships to the Muslim community, this too was not actually spent. Even the official figures show considerably variations between sanctioned and expended amount.³³ The Government also made discrimination in the award of scholarships meant for paupers and orphans. The lion's share of these scholarships was appropriated for the students belonging to the Pandit community. According to the official figures, out of 190 students who were in receipt of *Wazaif-i Yatama*, (scholarships meant for orphan students) there were only 42 Muslims and the rest were non-Muslims. Similarly, another kind of scholarship namely *Gaw Raksha Wazifa* (scholarship aimed at cow protection) which was meant for helping the poor and the orphan students of all the communities was practically given only to the candidates belonging to the Pandit community.³⁴

For encouraging higher education the Government had the provision of granting scholarships to those students who were interested in doing post-graduation in Science subjects. But to quote Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, "These scholarships were generally awarded to Pandit students". It may be noted that the Shaikh himself made persistent requests for the grant of this scholarship, but all in vain.³⁵ For going abroad for further studies the Government had fixed the age limit of the aspirant candidates at 24 years. But this was a deliberate policy to eliminate the Muslim students from the race for going for higher studies as the Muslim students, because of their poor educational background, usually started their education very late. The fact that the Muslims understood the logic behind fixing this age limit is clear from the following statement of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, the then budding leader of the community:³⁶

I was the first Kashmiri Muslim to get M.Sc. degree. After returning to Kashmir I applied for going abroad to receive higher education. For entertaining such applications the Government had fixed twenty-four years as the age limit. Since I had already crossed this limit, my application was rejected. The Government had fixed this age limit under a plan. Its main purpose was to keep the Muslims away from the opportunity of receiving higher education. Generally, these people were not in a position to attend such institutions and if anyone desired to go abroad, the age bar acted as a stumbling block in his way. Thus, the Government betrayed the Muslim candidates and made backdoor entries of privileged candidates. After my constant failure, I reached the conclusion that to expect justice from the prevailing system was only an illusion.

Instead of getting sensitive about the educational grievances of the Muslim community the Government further offended the Muslims by its policy of sidelining the "Special Inspector for Muhammadan Education", which was created prior to the appointment of Sharp Commission in response to the strong Muslim agitation both inside and outside the State. In this regard the Glancy Commission Report Records:³⁷

It appears that for the last eleven years this official has been deflected from his proper work and has been deputed to discharge the general duties of an ordinary Assistant Inspector in one particular division.

In 1910 the official records put the total number of Muslim literates at 4,760.³⁸ But the majority of them were either simple literates meaning knowing reading and writing an ordinary letter³⁹ or literates in traditional learning or simply possessing elementary education imparted in primary schools. However, it was with the beginning of the twentieth century that we find an increasing number of Muslim literates owing to the expansion of schools.⁴⁰ We also find a sizeable number of middle pass and matriculate Muslim students,⁴¹ some of whom went for higher studies.

In the twenties of the twentieth century, the number of the Muslim students in educational institutions rose to become equal to, if not greater than, the non-Muslim students.⁴² Of course, their number was less in the colleges. But an interesting feature of the education and Muslim community was that many of them, in imitation of Pandit boys, went outside for obtaining higher academic degrees from different universities of British India. And it was these young educated Muslims who became the harbingers of political consciousness in Kashmir.⁴³ A sizeable number of Muslim literates in Kashmir, who were mostly middle pass and matriculates, acted as active workers of the new leadership as in comparison to illiterate masses they could understand

the message dinned into their ears.

Modern education made the Muslim youth conscious about their rights and about the power they possessed to change the character of the Government with the support of the oppressed masses. The great seat of learning (i.e. the Indian universities) from which they obtained their degrees educated them about practical politics, as these institutions were also the hubs of political activities. Moreover, the Indian situation which was experiencing a tremendous wave of patriotism and high sense of sacrifice among its citizens for freedom fired the imagination of the Kashmiri Muslim youth for liberating their land, which was under the subjugation of more tyrannous rule than that of the British India. Writing about the impact of Indian nationalism on the Muslim educated youth who received education from different Indian universities, the contemporary freedom fighter and historian Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz remarks:⁴⁴

The glorious chapter in the history of the National Movement of India could not but produce profound effect on the minds of the Kashmiri Muslim young men, who were studying in different universities and had therefore the opportunity to witness the various phases of the movement with their own eyes.

Fired with the spark of freedom... a batch of young men returned to their home early in 1931. The echoes and the reverberations of the Civil Disobedience Movement had been heard in the mountains and the Valley of Kashmir in advance of the return of these young men. It had created an atmosphere of defiance to cruel and despotic authority of the alien Dogra rulers. The stage was set with all the paraphernalia; only the actors were needed to play their parts. Who but these educated and enthusiastic young men were best suited for the task.

It is interesting to note that even those Kashmiri Muslim students who had gone to India for receiving higher religious education also returned as firebrand patriots obviously because none of the educational institutions of India, whether secular or religious, could remain uninfluenced by the tempestuous wave of nationalism that had hardly left anybody unmoved. Writing about Mirwaiz Muhammad Yousuf who returned to Kashmir in 1931 after receiving education from Dar-ul-uloom Deoband and gave his whole-hearted support to nascent political consciousness of Kashmiri Muslims, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah remarks:⁴⁵

It was during these times that late Mirwaiz Muhammad Yousuf Shah returned from Deoband after the completion of his education, and he too had been influenced by modern ideas and thinking. He had

also been influenced by some outstanding ulema (theologists) of Deoband and the spirit of the Khilafat Movement of India.

It may be emphasised that after remaining from Indian universities, the main grievance of the Muslim educated youth against the Government was its denial to provide them suitable jobs.⁴⁶ The worst hit of the prevailing system was none other than Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, an outstanding leader of the Kashmir freedom movement. After obtaining the degree of M.Sc. from the Aligarh Muslim University he was simply appointed as a school teacher,⁴⁷ whereas only a decade earlier (1920) the Deputy Commissioner of Mirpur namely Makhan Singh was totally illiterate.⁴⁸ Thus, imbued by the modern ideas, trained through exposure to plains, influenced with the Indian national movement and fed up with the prevailing system, these young men started a Reading Room at Fateh Kadal, Srinagar where they used to discuss the problems created by the autocratic regime.⁴⁹ It was the Reading Room party which ultimately blazed the trail for freedom in Kashmir.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*, p.356.
2. For the poor and late response of Kashmiri Muslims to modern education see Ernest Neve, *Beyond the Pir Panjal*, p.256.
3. For the rich literary background of Kashmiri Pandits see Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, pp.228-229.
4. The official version that the peasants regarded education useless by attributing this saying "pari pathi gali tarathi, hal vaga tukra phage" (education brings ruin, it is by ploughing that bread can be had) to them should be understood in this context. Census of India, 1911, I, p.160; Census of India, 1931, II, p.254.
5. The core group of the religious class of Kashmiri Muslims, which formed the reference group of the Muslim community during pre-modern times, had large number of *murids* (followers) who considered it a religious duty to part with a fixed quantity of their produce with the *pir*. This is to some extent true of present times. The *pirs* (Muslim priests) also acted as judges and officiated the religious rites in lieu of which they also earned a good amount of money. Moreover, they used to be the preachers of big mosques, which also provided them money in terms of *niaz* every Friday. For details see Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, pp.233 and 291.
6. In 1891 there were 250 students receiving education in C.M.S. School, Srinagar, and all of them were Pandits (See Tyndale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, p.265); Biscoe writes that they "were the sons or grandsons of those officials who had bullied and squeezed the Muhammedan peasants for years past, and their large houses in the city, with all their wealth, were a standing witness to their looting powers, for the salary they received from the State was quite insignificant". Tyndale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, p.268.
7. The Muslim religious leaders stressed upon their community that the Western education would turn them apostates and thus they would not be able to distinguish between

right and wrong; For details see Prem Nath Bazaz *Inside Kashmir*, p.251; *The Ahl-i Hadis*, Lahore, January 15, 1926; *The Statesman*, Delhi, June 11, 1946; *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, June 2, 1946.

8. Tyndale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, p.265.
9. Prem Nath Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p.215.
10. The *madrasas* which existed in Srinagar during 1872 were *madrasa* of Nawakadal, *madrasa* of Maharaj Gung, *madrasa* of rainawari below Hari Parbat, *madrasa* of Basant Bagh and the *madrasa* of Aisha Koul. It is pertinent to mention here that only the *madrasas* of Nawakadal, Mahraj Gunj and Basant Bagh were aided by the Government. (Administrative Report of J and K 'Report-i Majmui', 1873, p.114). The information about the existence of above *madrasas* was supplied by Mr. Wynne, the then Officer on Special Duty in Kashmir, to the Secretary to Government of Punjab, NAI/Foreign, Pol.A, Feb. 1874, NOS 271-278.
11. JKA, Annual Administrative Report, 1891-92.
12. Riots Enquiry Committee Report, July, 1931; witness of Pirzada Ghulam witness No.87; JKA, File No.217/F-9 of 1913; It is pertinent to mention here that Kh. Ghulam Hassan Nizami of Delhi had also several meetings with Maharaja Pratap Singh wherein he pleaded for the amelioration of the conditions of Kashmiri Muslims; *Inqilab*, Lahore, July 6, 1931.
13. Glancy Commission Report vide *Dastawaizat*, pp.102-103.
14. Prem Nath Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, p.215.
15. JKA, File No.217/F-9 of 1913.
16. The post existed in Kashmir on the eve of the appointment of Sharp Commission. See Glancy Commission Report vide *Dastawaizat*, p.108.
17. It was as a result of the persuasion of the prominent Muslims within and outside the State that in 1916 Maharaja Pratab Singh invited Sir Henry Sharp, the Education Commissioner of India, to suggest ways and means of providing educational facilities for the Muslims of Kashmir. Mr. Sharp made a thorough enquiry into the grievances of the Muslims and after examining their demands submitted a Report. NAI, Foreign Political Establishment, August 1916, NOS. 167-68, part-B.
18. *Ibid.*, p.99.
19. *Ibid.*
20. "Soon after its publication the report was safely put in the Archives from where nobody could find it out. The Muslims rightly felt aggrieved over such a state of affairs", see Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, p.251.
21. Glancy Commission Report vide *Dastawaizat*, p.98.
22. Memorandum submitted to Maharaja Hari Singh by the Muslim representatives in 1931.
23. Out of 1,000 population of the Hindu community 555 lived in city and towns, whereas the number of Muslim urban dwellers was not more than 120 per thousand. Census of India 1921, I, p.48.
24. It may be noted that out of 3,579 villages of Kashmir there were 2,961 villages which had a population of 500 and below and till the end of our period of study even those villages which possessed 500 population did not have even a primary school though the same was recommended by the education commissions appointed by the Government from time to time to improve the system of education in Kashmir.

See Glancy Commission Report vide *Dastawaizat*, p.99; Recommendations of the Education Reorganization Committee, 1938.

25. Memorandum submitted to Lord Reading by the prominent Muslims of Srinagar in 1924.
26. Glancy Commission Report (1932) vide *Dastawaizat*, p.100.
27. *Siyasat*, Lahore, November 8, 1932.
28. Glancy Commission Report (1932) vide *Dastawaizat*, p.100.
29. Riots Enquiry Committee Report (1931); witness of Moulvi Muhammad Abdullah Wakil before the Riots Enquiry Committee, p.65.
30. Memorandum submitted to Lord Reading by the prominent Muslims of Srinagar in 1924.
31. Glancy Commission Report (1932) vide *Dastawaizat*, p.100.
32. *Ibid.*, p.102.
33. The following information pertaining to the allocation and expenditure of Muslim scholarships has been taken from the Glancy Commission Report (1932), vide *Dastawaizat*, p.103:

Year	Budget	Amount actually spent
1927-28	Rs.2,100	Rs.1,103/-
1928-29	Rs.4,200/-	Rs.4,072/-
1929-30	Rs.7,200/-	Rs.6,484/-
1930-31	Rs.19,400/-	Rs.16,321/-
34. *Ibid.*, p.104.
35. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, *Atish-i Chinar*, p.20.
36. *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.
37. Glancy Commission Report vide *Dastawaizat*, p.108.
38. Census of India, I, p.111.
39. For this contemporary definition of literacy see Census of India 1911, I, p.165.
40. In 1921 out of 1000 Muslim males 19 were literates. Census of India, 1921, I, p.121.
41. The distribution of Muslim students of Jammu and Kashmir according to institutions is detailed as below:

Colleges 132, Secondary Schools 21,478, Normal Schools 30, Maktabas 1,779; Annual Administrative Report of J and K, 1921, pp.97-98.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of the Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, p.147.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, *Atish-i Chinar*, p.71.
46. *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.
47. Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *History of Srinagar*, p.174.
48. Muhammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Vol.I, p.298.
49. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, *Atish-i Chinar*, pp.48-49.